Otter Harvest
2003-04

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Abstract

Wisconsin trappers harvested 1,588 otters during the 2003-04 season. This was a decrease of 23% from the otter harvest in 2002-03 and tied for the tenth highest harvest since Wisconsin has been registering otters. The counties of highest harvest all came from the northern part of the state. They were Sawyer (84), Oneida (78), Price (70), and Burnett (66).

Background

Bluett (1985) described the procedures for obtaining otter tags, and registering/tagging otters in Wisconsin. Dhuey, et al. (2003) described the results of the 2002-03 otter trapping season.

Methods

Non-Chippewa trappers are required to obtain an otter trapping permit before pursuing otter in Wisconsin. The application fee for an otter permit is $3.00, (included in the Patron license fee). Trappers were required to register all harvested otters with the DNR.

The 2003-04 otter season ran from 6 December 2003 – 30 April 2004 in the Northern Zone and 6 December 2003 - 7 March 2004 in the Central and Southern Zones (Fig. 1). The area of kill (county and deer management unit), date of kill, sex of the animal, type of trap used, type of animal (fur farm or wild), and the name and address of the trapper were recorded for each otter registered. These data were entered into the DNR UNIX computer by district personnel and summarized using the Statistical Analysis System (SAS). Otters trapped by Native Americans on ceded lands were included in the harvest summary. Data on off-reservation treaty otter harvest was provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (Jonathan Gilbert; pers. comm.).

Results

A total of 6,383 applicants applied for the 4,810 otter tags issued in 2003-04 season (Table 1). The average number of tags per applicant was 0.79 in the Northern Zone, 0.73 in the Central Zone, and 0.68 in the Southern Zone. There were approximately 31% more applicants for permits and 43% less permits available than in 2002-03 season. In addition, a Chippewa allocation of 66 otters was agreed to for their use during the Chippewa off-reservation trapping season (1 November 2003 to 31 March 2004) on ceded lands.

A total of 1,588 otters were harvested during the 2003-04 season. This was a decrease of 23% from last year. Permit success for the 2003-04 season (28%) was higher than last year (23%). (Table 1.) Chippewa trappers took 58 otters on ceded lands; 27 more than were harvested in the 2002-03 season (these data were provided by the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, P.O. Box 9, Odanah, WI, 54861). A total of 49 otter were registered with kill locations on Wisconsin's reservations. Native Americans are now registering a portion of on-reservation kills with DNR personnel. A total of 116 otters were registered as incidental, these were taken accidentally to other trapping activity or road kills. Both of these kill types are included in the statewide totals.

The average price paid for otter pelts by furbuyers was $89.49 in 2003-04. This was more than the $77.12 paid for otter pelts in 2002-03, and well above the long-term average of $39.11(Table 2).

Sawyer county had the highest number of otters harvested (84) followed by Oneida (78), Price (70), and Burnett (66) counties (Fig. 1). Deer management Unit 13 was the leading unit of harvest with 54 otters registered (Fig. 2).

More males (917; 57.7%) were trapped than females (626; 39.4%). Forty-five (2.8%) registration forms did not report the sex of the otter or reported the sex as unknown.

Conibear traps accounted for 79% of the otters harvested in 2003-04, and foothold traps accounted for 16% of the otter trapped. One percent of otters trapped were caught in snares.

About seven percent of the otters harvested this season were reported as being incidentally taken while trapping for other species. The regular beaver season preceded the opening and ran concurrent with the otter season. The WDNR Furbearer Advisory Committee recommended a statewide harvest goal of 1,200 otter in the 2004-05 season. Quota by zone is: North Zone, 720; Central Zone, 300; South Zone, 180.

Literature Cited

Bluett, R. 1985. The 1983-84 Otter Tagging Report. Wis. Dep. Nat. Resources. 7 pp.

Dhuey B. B. Kohn and J. Olson. 2003. Otter Harvest, 2002-03. IN: The Wisconsin Wildlife Surveys Report. August 2003. Document on file at the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources, Bureau of Research, Monona, WI. 53711.

Table 1. *2003-04 Wisconsin state otter harvest goal and applicant results.*

Zone	State Harvest Goal	Permits Issued	Applicants	Tags/ Applicant	State Harvest*	Percent Success
North	720	2,600	3,282	0.79	744	28.6%
Central	300	1,410	1,924	0.73	390	27.7%
South	180	800	1,177	0.68	230	28.8%
Unknown					1	
Total	**1,200**	**4,810**	**6,383**	**0.75**	**1,365**	**28.4%**

* Does not include incidental or tribal otter harvest.

Table 2. *The annual number of otter permits mailed to Wisconsin trappers, total otter harvest, and average pelt price, 1976-2004.*

Year	Number of Permits Mailed	Total Harvest	Average Pelt Price ($)
1976-77	5,050	1,271	
1977-78	5,218	1,113	47.83
1978-79	4,914	962	82.15
1979-80	5,754	1,448	60.05
1980-81	7,269	1,122	33.79
1981-82	8,256	1,024	26.89
1982-83	7,403	960	24.70
1983-84	8,294	995	25.68
1984-85	7,516	1,213	24.41
1985-86	7,104	960	22.84
1986-87	6,599	1,588	29.62
1987-88	9,360	1,724	23.87
1988-89	7,838	1,127	20.14
1989-90	6,360	1,213	24.11
1990-91	4,613	744	14.39
1991-92	2,799	762	12.50
1992-93	3,201	969	33.24
1993-94	5,531	1,130	57.30
1994-95	9,282	1,816	48.76
1995-96	14,800	1,517	44.47
1996-97	16,457	2,443	45.66
1997-98	15,429	2,704	43.70
1998-99	10,898	1,530	37.05
1999-2000	12,510	2,178	46.48
2000-01	11,180	1,844	54.01
2001-02	12,119	2,601	56.00
2002-03	8,370	2,053	77.12
2003-04	4,810	1,588	89.49

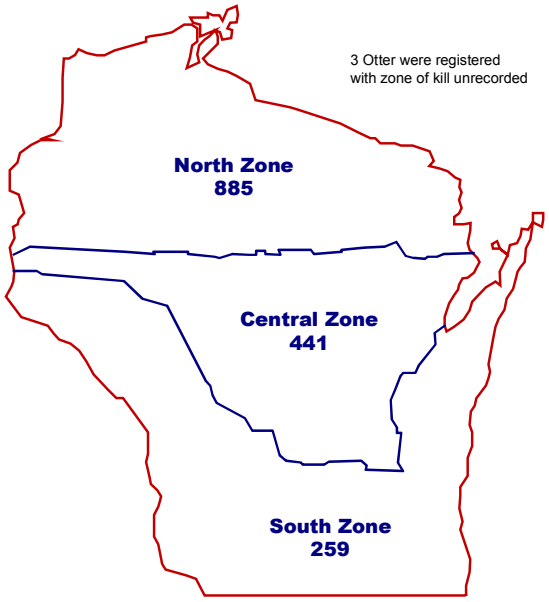

Figure 1. *2003-04 Otter kill by Zones.*

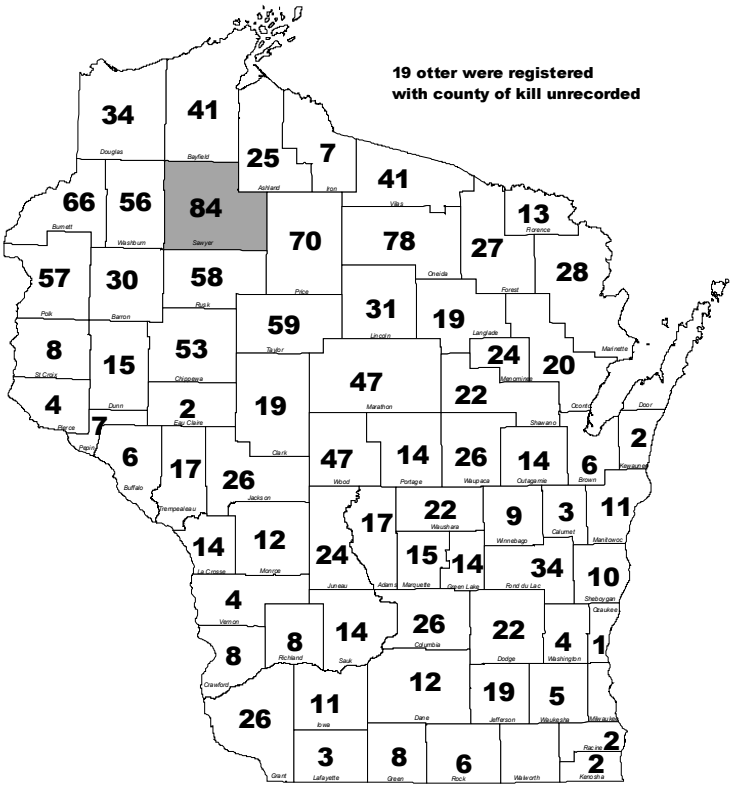

Figure 2. *The 2003-04 otter harvest by county. The leading otter harvest county is shaded.*

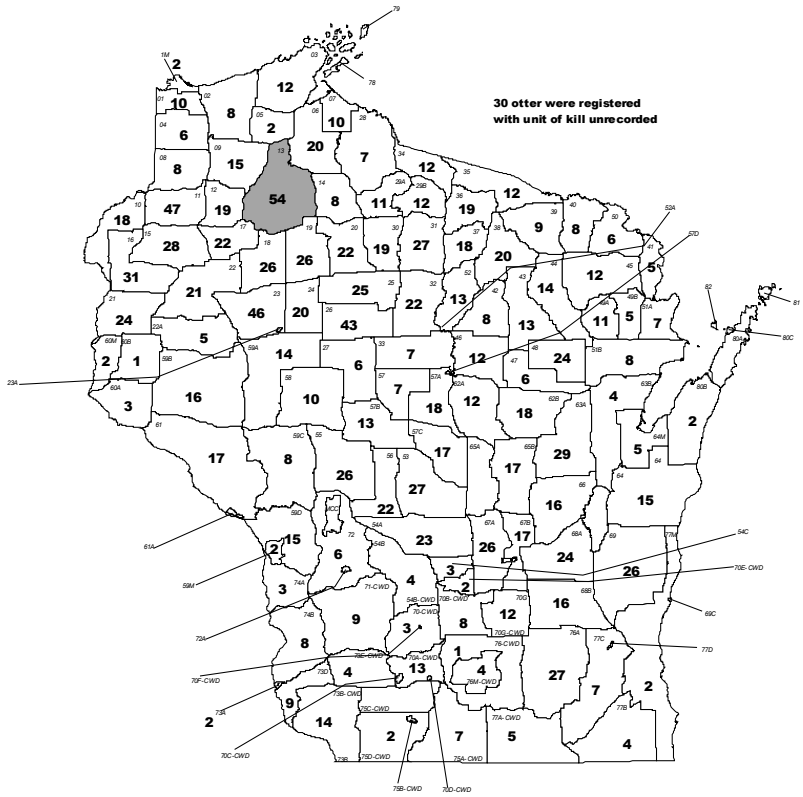

Figure 3. *The 2003-04 otter harvest by deer management unit. The leading management unit is shaded.*